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AUTHOR Hynes, Kathryn; O'Connor, Susan; Chung, An-Me
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ABSTRACT

Noting that many after-school programs are exploring ways to help children develop strong literacy skills, this paper is designed to help program providers think about ways to support literacy development, clarify the types of services various staff are qualified to provide, and offer ideas about strategies to best meet the needs of children and families. The paper also provides information on how children learn to read, reasons for reading difficulties, and what can be done to help. The literacy strategies discussed are: (1) building a quality program foundation; (2) introducing literacy activities into programs; (3) integrating literacy activities into programs; and (4) providing individualized support. The paper also gives recommendations for providing services for children with learning disabilities and children whose first language is not English. The paper concludes by asserting that programs should begin slowly to develop supports for children's literacy, develop one literacy support at a time, and seek advice from local experts or other after school programs. The paper's appendix contains additional information, including publications of interest and contact information for organizations that can help after school providers explore ways to support children's literacy development. (Contains 28 references.) (KB)

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Literacy: Exploring Strategies to Enhance Learning in After-School Programs

Kathryn Hynes
Susan O'Connor
An-Me Chung

The MOST Initiative

December 1999

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Center for Research on Women
Wellesley College

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Introduction

After-school programs across the country are exploring ways to support children's literacy development. Parents, program staff, teachers, and policymakers are concerned about the number of children who lack the skills needed to become successful adults. In many states, new academic standards have been developed and new programs implemented to provide children with the education and skills they need. Literacy is one area where all children need support and many children need extra help.

In the past, literacy was defined as the ability to read and write. Today, creative thinking and problem solving have been added to the definition. The National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST) and many other educators support the broad definition of "literacy" as a child's ability to absorb information, understand that information, and communicate a successful response. Literacy becomes not only reading and writing, but also speaking, gathering information, thinking critically, understanding others, and expressing oneself (Adapted from definition by National Institute for Literacy, 1998a).

Literacy Includes

- Reading
- Writing
- Speaking
- Gathering information
- Thinking critically
- Understanding others
- Expressing oneself

(Source: Adapted from definition by National Institute for Literacy, 1998a)

After-school programs are increasingly being pressured to provide comprehensive services that meet children's needs for everything from nutrition and personal safety to academic and emotional support. Although academic success is important for children, NIOST believes that high-quality after-school programs focus on the development of the whole child, integrating academic supports such as literacy skills into programming that also promotes children's social, emotional, and physical development. After-school providers know that children cannot sit still and study all day; they need exercise and time for creative play. Children also need to learn how to build healthy relationships with both peers and adults. By taking an approach that intentionally balances these competing pressures and focuses on the unique needs of each child, programs can not only provide successful services but can help children learn to establish and maintain balanced and healthy lifestyles themselves. Integrating support for learning into after-school programs requires careful thought and planning. There is no single correct approach. Each program must work with parents, schools, and children to assess the available resources and the needs of the particular children, then choose the best possible solutions.

Many after-school programs are just beginning to explore ways to help children develop strong literacy skills. Some program staff worry that supporting academics will change the focus of their program. Some would like to help children improve their literacy skills but aren't sure of the best way to proceed. This paper will help after-school program providers think about many different ways to support children's literacy development. It will help clarify which services people with different backgrounds and training (such as support tutors, program staff, teachers, and reading specialists) are qualified to provide. It will also offer ideas for helping you decide which strategies best meet the needs of children and families, based on the resources available to your program. But first we will examine how children learn to read, why so many children struggle with reading, and what can be done to help. The appendix of the paper provides suggestions about where to look for further information.

What Is at Stake for Children?

Children are not reading at lower levels than they have in the past. In fact, average literacy levels for children have been about the same, and in some cases have increased slightly, over the past 20 years (National Assessment of Education Progress, 1998). Concerns about children's literacy skills arise from the fact that today's economy demands higher literacy levels from its workforce. In order to have a successful career, an increasing percentage of workers will need to read, process, and analyze complex information and solve problems effectively (National Research Council, 1998). In addition, the Internet is increasingly used as a primary way to disseminate critical information, and those who cannot read well will be at a distinct disadvantage in accessing this information (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 1998).

Strong literacy skills give people certain advantages in life. Research shows that people with high education and literacy levels are more likely to have high annual earnings and low unemployment rates (U.S. Department of Education, 1993). People with stronger literacy skills are also less likely to have a criminal record or engage in substance abuse (U.S. Department of Education, 1993).

Outcomes for Children Who Have Difficulty Learning to Read:

- Ten to fifteen percent eventually drop out of high school.
- Only two percent earn a degree from a four-year college.

(Source: NICHD, 1998)

Researchers have found that childhood reading difficulties are linked to several troubling outcomes. As the box on the left shows, children who have difficulty learning to read are at higher risk of dropping out of high school, and only a small percentage complete college. These connections between reading skills and long-term outcomes mean that educators and parents must address problems early and find ways to support children's literacy skill development.

Poor outcomes for children who struggle with reading extend beyond school, and include negative effects on their social development and self-esteem. Children may feel ashamed and embarrassed when their peers receive praise and rewards for learning more quickly (NICHD, 1998). After-school programs can offer children who have struggled during the school day a non-threatening environment where they can practice literacy skills without competition or fears related to being graded.

The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) reports that about half of youth with criminal records and half of those with a history of substance abuse have difficulty reading (NICHD, 1998). These strong connections between reading difficulties, criminal behavior, and substance abuse remind educators to look at the whole child when thinking about interventions for academic difficulty. In after-school programs, literacy supports can be integrated with activities that will help children build the social skills and self-confidence they need.

Just as many children struggle with reading, many adults have poor literacy skills as well. The U.S. Department of Education conducted a large-scale study of adult literacy levels in 1993. The study found that 21–23 percent of adults in the United States had very low literacy skills, which meant they could not perform basic tasks such as completing an application for a Social Security

card (National Institute for Literacy, 1998b). In fact, the literacy skills of adults in 1993 were found to be somewhat lower, on average, than they were in a study done in 1985 (U.S. Department of Education, 1993).

Adults with low literacy skills have limited employment choices and are much more likely to live in poverty (see box on right). According to the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL), "welfare recipients with low education skills stay on welfare the longest; those with stronger education skills become self-sufficient more quickly" (NIFL, 1998a).

Of adults with very low literacy skills:

- 43 percent live in poverty,
- 17 percent receive food stamps, and
- 70 percent have no job or a part-time job.

(Source: National Institute for Literacy, 1998a)

As it becomes increasingly important for children to have strong literacy skills, schools, after-school programs, and parents need to work together to ensure that all children learn to read, write and communicate well.

Research on Learning to Read

Learning to read is a challenging and exciting task for a child. Children do not all learn to read at the same age, but most are able to read simple stories by age 7 (U.S. Department of Education, 1999). Some children learn to read quite early, while others do not learn until later reading (see the Appendix for general expectations for children of different ages). If a child learns to read a bit later than his or her peers, it does not necessarily mean that he or she has a learning disability or will have long-term problems with reading.

Researchers have found that children who grow up in certain environments are more likely to learn to read easily. Children who learn to read with little assistance are usually those who:

- have been provided with positive expectations about literacy at an early age;
- have had quality experiences with literacy since birth, including opportunities to read, write, and communicate;
- are given support for and encouragement regarding reading-related activities and attitudes;
- know about and are prepared to benefit from formal school instruction; and
- attend school in an instructional environment conducive to learning.

(National Research Council, 1998)

"With good instruction that draws on multiple reading strategies, most children will learn to read. If children who struggle were identified early and given remedial help, the number of children reading below established standards would drop dramatically."
(Interview with Lena Townsend, Institute for Literacy Studies, 1999)

After-school providers who understand these factors can provide some of the positive environments and encouragement that children need in order to learn. They can also help parents provide activities and experiences that support literacy development at home.

Across the country, educators are focusing attention on helping children become strong readers by the end of third grade. President Bill Clinton has included this criterion in his learning goals for the nation. Why the end of third grade? Because beginning around fourth grade, children are expected to learn history, science, literature, and other academic subjects through reading. If children cannot read well, they will not be able to keep up in school (NICHD, 1998). Also, children

who have struggled with reading for several years often lose their motivation to keep trying (National Research Council, 1998). Researchers can actually predict a child's chance of dropping out of high school based on his or her literacy level at the end of the third grade (National Research Council, 1998). Although 80 percent of children learn to read relatively easily, about 10 million children will struggle (NICHD, 1998). While it is important to provide literacy support to all children, it is critical that children who are struggling receive extra help as early as possible to avoid possible negative outcomes.

Children Who Have Difficulties Learning to Read

Most programs have a few children enrolled who struggle with reading. But some program providers should be aware that they are likely to have a much larger number of children who will not learn to read easily. Research has shown that there are certain groups of children who are more likely to experience difficulty learning to read well. Factors beyond these children's control (known as risk factors) affect their learning. Risk factors are specific individual or group traits that indicate that the children affected are *more likely* than their peers to have difficulty learning to read. However, the presence of a risk factor does not mean that a child *will* have difficulties.

It is important for after-school program providers to learn about risk factors. If many of the children in your program have more than one risk factor, you may have a significant percentage of children struggling with reading. Research has shown that the factors listed below increase the chances that a child will struggle with reading:

Group Risk Factors

- Children who live in poor neighborhoods and/or are part of low-income families
- Children who attend schools in which achievement is chronically low
- Children whose first language is not English and who do not speak English well
- Children who speak a dialect of English that differs substantially from the one used in school

Individual Risk Factors

- Children whose parents have histories of reading difficulties
- Children who had fewer experiences speaking and reading before they started school
- Children who have been diagnosed with a language, hearing, or mental disability
- Children with severe attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder

(Source: National Research Council, 1998)

It is especially important that programs serving children affected by these risk factors provide as many quality literacy supports as they can, such as reading aloud to younger children, quiet reading time for older children, fun activities that will build motivation, and access to exciting books on many topics. Another important way to support children is to broaden their horizons by providing access to new and exciting experiences, exposing children to new careers and other cultures, and taking children on trips to museums and other cultural institutions.

In addition to the above-mentioned risk factors, there is a popular belief that boys are more likely to have reading difficulties than girls are. Research has shown, however, that equal numbers of boys and girls have difficulty learning to read. More boys than girls are identified by teachers as

having reading problems, probably because boys are more likely to externalize their behavior (e.g., act up or be disruptive). Girls with reading difficulties are more likely to withdraw quietly, trying to avoid attention from teachers or peers (NICHD, 1998). Because they often have the opportunity to work one-on-one with children and may have the same children in their programs for many years, after-school program providers sometimes notice these troubling signs and can talk to parents about their concerns.

Although risk factors may lead to difficulties in reading, they do not explain why a child is not reading or what to do about it. There are several primary reasons that children struggle with reading (see box below).

Main Reasons that Children Struggle with Reading

- Difficulty understanding and using the alphabetic principle (the idea that letters represent sounds and spoken words)
- Cannot transfer comprehension skills used for speaking to reading, and have difficulty developing new comprehension strategies
- Little or no motivation to read; little or no appreciation of rewards of reading

(Source: National Research Council, 1998)

For many children who have difficulty learning to read, the problem lies in converting sounds to written letters and words. "Written English is like a code: the 26 letters of the alphabet, either singly or in combination with other letters, stand for 44 phonemes (sounds) that are used to speak" (NICHD, 1998). When children learn to read, they need to understand that spoken words are made up of these sounds. They learn that written letters or groups of letters are symbols for these sounds. Research shows that although "most children grasp this concept easily, no matter what method is used to teach them … at least 20 percent of children must be taught this letter-sound system directly in order to learn to read" (NICDH, 1998).

For children struggling to read, the most successful strategy is direct instruction from a certified reading specialist (National Research Council, 1998), who can determine why the child is struggling and develop strategies that will help the child read. Although many programs do not have reading teachers on staff to provide this specialized support for children, after-school programs can provide valuable supports by building an enriching learning environment that motivates children to learn and builds their confidence. Program providers can work closely with school personnel to identify the children who are having difficulty learning to read. The teaching team or the guidance counselor may be able to identify the ways to support literacy development for individual children during out-of-school time. More and more states have standardized tests or may use reading assessment tools to identify specific goals for students.

What Works?

There are four primary reasons that after-school programs can provide valuable support to children's literacy development. First, children struggle with reading for many different reasons. Even if your program has no previous literacy experience, activities that many programs already offer—such as conversing with children, helping them pursue their interests, and taking field trips—support children's literacy development. (These activities are discussed further on the following pages.) For younger children, reading stories aloud is a simple, yet powerful support. Staff can also build on existing activities by intentionally integrating literacy in creative ways, showing children how the reading and writing skills they learn in school can help them achieve goals based on their own interests.

Second, after-school programs can support learning by providing children with activities that focus on different elements of our definition of literacy, such as problem-solving skills, speaking and listening skills, creative thinking, and computer skills. The flexible and less formal environment of after-school programs makes it possible for children to explore their own interests and try things without the worry of tests or grades. After-school programs can also provide ample opportunities for children to work together on projects, thereby improving their social skills while practicing problem solving.

Third, after-school programs help build children's background knowledge and experience by opening the door to other worlds through trips to cultural institutions and performances; exposure to music, dance, and the arts; and interaction with adults who have time to share their life experiences and skills. Some programs serve children who have limited life experiences: they have never been out of their neighborhood, been exposed to art or drama, or seen books about foreign countries. Such background knowledge is essential to literacy development. New experiences build vocabulary and broaden students' concepts about life.

Finally, research clearly shows that children's intellectual development is linked to their social, emotional, and physical well-being (NIOST, 1999). Often, children at high risk of academic failure are also experiencing emotional and behavioral problems, poverty, or poor health. After-school programs that provide a safe and nurturing setting—along with exciting projects that build children's motivation to learn, reduce their stress and anxiety levels, and provide them with conflict resolution skills—indirectly boost children's ability to succeed in school. For most children's academic skills to flourish, their social, emotional, and physical needs must be met.

Children also need to learn to build a balanced lifestyle that includes exercise, good nutrition, healthy relationships, and a love of learning. Just as adults would find it tiring to take out their briefcases and work for two hours every evening after getting home from work, children cannot be expected to leave school, arrive at an after-school program, and immediately delve into more academics. Programs can help children learn to manage their time, balancing responsibilities such as chores and homework with time for friends, exercise, and creative activities.

Deciding What Works for Your Program

There are many different ways that after-school programs can support children's literacy development. The National Institute on Out-of-School Time developed the chart shown on page 8 to help program staff think about the kinds of support to provide for children, based on the resources available to them, and the interests of children and parents. The following pages provide a detailed explanation of the ideas presented in the chart.

While reading the chart and the accompanying narrative, consider the needs of the children in your program and the resources available to you. Most program providers will want to meet with key stakeholders, including parents, teachers, children, and program staff, to decide what types of support the after-school program should provide, based on these assessments. Program providers can invite parents, teachers, and staff to an informal potluck dinner as a way to bring everyone together.

Here are a few questions to keep in mind as you think about what your program already does to support literacy development, what your goals are, and what resources are available to your program:

- How many children in this program are struggling with literacy skills?
- What supports are children getting during the school day?
- What activities and supports do parents, teachers, and program staff feel the children most need from the after-school program?
- What activities does this program already provide that support literacy development?
- What supports can this program provide that will meet children's needs and complement the strategies used during the school day?
- Are there local teachers or other literacy experts who can help build the program's literacy component?

If discussions with key stakeholders show that literacy support should be a priority for your program, after-school program providers may want to develop a literacy improvement plan. This plan would address questions such as

- What literacy supports does this program already provide?
- Which three components would we like to focus on improving? (Examples can be found in the "Approaches" section of the literacy chart.)
- What resources will we need (e.g., materials and supplies, staff training, volunteers or paid tutors) in order to make these improvements?
- Where can we find these resources?
- How will we know we've reached our goals?
- How can we measure the outcomes of our literacy work, or add such a measurement to our current program assessment strategies?

A Continuum of Literacy Strategies for After-School Programs

The chart below was designed to help staff decide what kind of literacy supports to provide for children, based on the children's needs and the available resources. Although one could approach these strategies differently, we view these levels in a continuum, with each strategy building on the one before it. Literacy experts strongly recommend that programs offer only those supports that can be implemented successfully, given the available resources.

	Approaches	Achievable Outcomes	Necessary Supports and Resources
Strategy: Building a Quality Foundation Program works to improve the quality of out-of-school-time services provided before adding literacy activities.	• Support well-trained, consistent staff who build warm relationships with children and who are thoughtful about their actions. • Develop a schedule that is flexible and offers children security, independence, and stimulation. • Provide activity choices that reflect children's interests and needs, cultural backgrounds, and developmental levels. • Build indoor and outdoor environments that are comfortable, well stocked, and well equipped and that enhance creativity and learning.	• Quality after-school programs have been shown to reduce juvenile crime, drug and alcohol use, and teen sexual activity. • Quality programs can provide a safe, enriching environment that supports children's emotional, social, physical, and intellectual development.	• NSACA standards • A core group of consistent, well-trained program staff • Program policies and procedures • A stable financing plan and budget
Strategy: Introducing Literacy Activities into the Program Program provides the foundations on which strong literacy skills are built.	• Create a print-rich, language-rich, literature-rich environment. • Use every teachable moment to engage kids in reading, writing, and speaking. • Model interest in literacy and show children ways that literacy skills are useful in life. • Encourage frequent meaningful conversation and facilitate discussions of current topics. • Show ways to gather information and access resources in the community.	• Increase motivation. • Increase the amount of reading, writing, and speaking children do. • Increase vocabulary. • Increase background knowledge that is necessary for reading.	• Information on how to integrate literacy activities into programs. • Ample training and supervision for staff and volunteers. • Technical assistance from reading experts as necessary. • Adequate yearly budget to build a diverse library of developmentally appropriate books to display and lend
Strategy: Integrating Literacy Activities into the Program Program builds practice of literacy skills into other activities.	• Incorporate reading, writing, and speaking into other activities such as the arts, theater, music, community service, and field trips. • Involve tutors who are well trained and well supervised. • Develop family literacy activities.	• Children see that literacy skills help them achieve their goals. • Increase time spent practicing literacy skills. • Increase motivation. • Increase one-on-one attention children receive.	• *External support needed:* training and on-site technical assistance from reading experts or educators. • Support includes staff training, tutor supervision, environment assessment, goal setting, planning, and evaluation.
Strategy: Individualized Support Program provides direct reading instruction to children who need it.	• Link to schools and parents. • Develop individual plans for each child. • Implement individual plans. • Expand family literacy components.	• Improve reading skills through direct instruction. • Provide remediation. • Increase family support for literacy.	• *Reading specialist on staff.* An after-school program cannot work on remediating reading difficulties without a trained, credentialed reading specialist on staff or available to provide ongoing supervision and technical assistance.

Guidelines for Success

Provide only those supports that you can provide well. It is better to do a few things well than to take on too many new projects and have none be successful. Think carefully about the internal and external resources—such as your staff, teachers, librarians, or reading experts—that are available to help you.

Set realistic goals for your program. Program staff, parents, children, and schoolteachers should discuss the needs of the children in the program. Decide what your goals are. Then discuss whether the resources that you will need to meet your goals are available to the program.

After-school programs can complement the school's curriculum. Whenever possible, work with children's teachers and the school's reading teachers to decide what your program can do to support skills learned during the school day[1]. Think creatively! For example, if children are learning about other parts of the country, an after-school program may be able to establish a pen pal exchange.

Build literacy activities into larger theme projects. Children learn well when they are excited about a project or a new experience. Programs can help children improve their literacy skills by encouraging them to read, write, and discuss what they learn as they explore different parts of their environment and pursue projects of their own creation.

Be careful what you promise. It is very difficult to prove that an after-school program providing support for children's literacy skills has actually improved children's test scores. Focus on other outcomes, such as the number of books the children read, the amount of time they spend reading or writing, or surveys with children to see if their attitudes about reading have changed.

Children with reading difficulties need expert help. Only a certified reading teacher or a literacy specialist can attempt to provide remediation to students with serious reading problems.

Make it fun! Always be aware that children's motivation—their desire to learn—is crucial for success. Children who dislike reading during the school day may be excited to read books about topics of their own choosing.

Strategy: Building a Quality Program Foundation

A quality program is the foundation on which all activities rest. Programs that are in crisis or are struggling to maintain a safe and stable environment may need to work to improve their overall quality before taking on literacy-support activities.

Quality after-school programs include the following four components:

- relationships with caring, competent, and consistent adults
- access to enriching learning activities

[1] Programs that serve children from many different schools may have a more difficult time accomplishing this task.

- access to safe and healthy environments
- partnerships with families, schools, and communities

Approaches

- Support well-trained, consistent staff who build warm relationships with children and who are thoughtful about their actions.
- Develop a schedule that is flexible but structured and offers children security, independence, and stimulation.
- Provide activity choices that reflect children's interests and needs, cultural backgrounds, developmental levels, and personalities.
- Build indoor and outdoor environments that are comfortable and full of materials and equipment that enhance creativity and learning.

Possible Outcomes

Several studies have shown that the quality of an after-school program has a direct affect on children's outcomes. While low-quality programs have been shown to have negative or neutral effects on children, high-quality programs boast positive outcomes including reduced drug use, reduced crime, increased school attendance, improved attitudes, and better behavior (NIOST, 1998).

Necessary Supports and Resources

The National School-Age Care Alliance (NSACA) publishes *Standards for Quality School-Age Care*. All staff members should be familiar with these standards, which consist of 36 keys that are divided into six areas:

- healthy relationships
- indoor environments
- outdoor environments
- activities
- safety, health, and nutrition
- administration

For program providers seeking tools for quality improvement, the NSACA offers a program improvement kit called *ARQ: Advancing and Recognizing Quality*. ARQ includes a self-study process that helps program staff, parents, children, and the community explore the strengths and challenges of a program, develop a plan for improvement, implement that plan, then assess how the changes have affected the program (see Appendix for information on how to contact NSACA).

Program providers can also seek out technical assistance for program improvement. An experienced out-of-school-time practitioner who has been trained to support program improvement can be a wonderful help as you work to reach your goals. NIOST has trained and supervised a group of technical advisors known as Quality Advisors. Contact your local state NSACA affiliate to learn about technical advisors in your area.

Strategy: Introducing Literacy Activities into Programs

At this level, programs work to provide children with environments and activities that will help them develop many of the underlying skills, understanding, and motivation that provide a foundation on which strong literacy skills are built. Although program providers may want to seek outside help to implement some of these strategies, programs that have no outside assistance should still be able to provide many of these supports.

The National Research Council convened a nationwide team of experts to review all of the existing research on *how* children learn to read, write, and speak; *why* all children are not reading at high enough levels; and *what* we can do about it. According to these researchers, "excellent instruction is the best intervention for children who demonstrate problems learning to read" (National Research Council, 1998). What does this mean for after-school programs that set out to help children read but do not have trained reading experts on staff? It means that the role of out-of-school-time providers is to *support or complement* the reading instruction being done in school, while meeting their goals to build a more informal, flexible environment where children can explore other talents, learn social skills, and have a break from the school day. If the staff understand the reasons that the strategies and outcomes listed below support literacy development, then integrating activities into your program will be easier and more successful. Two simple questions should be kept in mind: Are children actively reading, writing, and communicating? And are they having fun?

Approaches

- *Create a print-rich, language-rich, literature-rich environment.*

In a print-rich environment, children are surrounded by words. There are books on the shelves, posters with writing on the walls, and daily opportunities for children to participate in activities such as writing lists, reading directions, and talking about what is happening in their lives. A print-rich environment gives children constant opportunities to increase the amount of reading they do and increase their vocabulary through exposure to new words and provides them with access to tools such as books, magazines, posters, pencils, and paper. A print-rich environment helps children learn the many contexts for reading and writing and shows them that the program values literacy skills. Also think about the materials that you currently have available to children. If you do not have enough money for additional materials, try to collaborate with your local public school or library.

Materials for a Print-Rich Environment

- Age- and culturally appropriate books for children to read
- Big books to read aloud to children
- Pencils, pens, markers, erasers
- Many kinds of paper for writing and drawing
- Dictionaries and encyclopedias
- Newspapers and magazines for reading and for cutting up
- Posters, pictures, and charts hung on the wall
- Children's projects displayed
- Staff greet children as they enter the program and spend as much time as possible talking to them

- *Use every teachable moment to engage children in literacy activities.*

Train staff to recognize and respond to opportunities to engage children in literacy activities. Reading stories aloud is one of the best ways to engage young children (and sometimes older children, too) in literacy activities. This strategy is especially important for programs serving children whose parents may not read aloud regularly. If a child wants to know more about frogs

after reading a story with a frog in it, help the child to find information about frogs from the library or take a walk to a local pond to observe frogs in their own habitat. Not all children will be interested in the same topics. Instead listen carefully to children and encourage them to explore a topic that truly interests them.

Model Program – Literacy Enhancement Services Program

Parents United for Child Care
30 Winter Street, 7th Floor
Boston, MA 02108-4720
Contact: Charmaine Arthur
(617) 426-8288

and

ReadBoston
43 Hawkins Street
Boston, MA 02114
Contact: Laura Sitterley
(617) 918-5286

Parents United for Child Care and ReadBoston have worked together to develop the Literacy Enhancement Services Program, which works to infuse quality literacy curriculum into after-school programming by providing training and enrichment opportunities for program staff. The Literacy Enhancement Services Program is designed to provide support for after-school programs that are just beginning to explore ways to support children's literacy development.

Parents United for Child Care and ReadBoston train and supervise VISTA volunteers who work as literacy advisors to after-school programs and staff. A literacy advisor works one-on-one with each program chosen for the initiative to craft a service package that meets the individual needs of the program and staff. Each package of services includes varied combinations of the following:

Assessment, observation, and planning. Working with a literacy advisor, program directors and staff have the opportunity to reflect on their current programming while constructing a plan for future literacy development. Literacy advisors also spend several days observing the program site before drafting a recommendation for follow-up services.

Training. Some literacy topics require a formal environment for staff learning. Advisors work with providers outside of program time to address some of the following literacy concerns: parent involvement in literacy, how to create a print-rich environment, and integrating literacy into other program areas (art, science, music, gym, field trips, etc.).

Modeling and coaching. Advisors model literacy activities for staff, allowing providers the opportunity to observe the creative engagement of children through literacy. Following several sessions of modeling, advisors shift their focus to coaching program staff through the development and presentation of a self-generated literacy activity. Possible topics offered include drama and storytelling, poetry, cooking, and story writing.

Now in its second year, the Parents United for Child Care and ReadBoston literacy initiative has benefited tremendously from the feedback and experience of the VISTA literacy advisors who piloted the program during the 1998/1999 school year. One key lesson from the program's pilot year was the importance of clearly defined roles and expectations for programs, staff, VISTA volunteers, and lead agencies.

Model interest in, and uses of, literacy skills.

> *"The values, attitudes, and expectations held by parents and other caregivers with respect to literacy are likely to have a lasting effect on a child's attitude about learning to read."*
>
> (Source: National Research Council, 1998)

Children are anxious to learn about the adult world. If they see staff members carrying newspapers, reading, and discussing interesting topics, then they too will want to do these things. Program staff should be trained to see themselves as role models for children. Directors should consider candidates' literacy skills when hiring staff. Staff members need strong literacy skills if they are to develop creative ways to support children's literacy and model literacy skills. If program staff members do not have strong literacy skills, it's important to bring children into contact with adults who do, by introducing volunteers from local colleges or from the business community to do projects with children, or by taking weekly trips to a local library.

- *Build communication skills by encouraging frequent meaningful conversations and facilitating discussions on current events and events in children's lives.*

Increasingly, psychologists, educators, and employers understand the importance of strong communication skills in achieving success. Children need strong communication skills to build self-confidence and healthy relationships. It is important for children to learn to discuss the events occurring in the world around them and in their own lives. Not only will the discussion allow them to practice speaking and listening skills, it will help them better understand themselves and their world.

- *Expose children to new experiences, people, and career possibilities.*

Children need opportunities to build their background knowledge by experiencing the world around them. Staff can plan field trips for children, taking them to traditional locations such as local museums, aquariums, and parks but also considering other ideas for stimulating field trips based on the children's interests. For example, if children are interested in learning about recycling, field trip destinations could include the dump or a recycling plant. Build literacy activities around the idea of recycling by reading about recycling and the environment and discussing ways to improve recycling in your program. Encourage children to learn about careers that interest them, then invite local professionals to speak with children about what they do. After the speaker leaves, facilitate a discussion about the children's thoughts and reactions, and ask the children who are interested what they would need to do in order to prepare for that profession.

- *Learn about ways to gather information and access resources in their community.*

Access to information is exploding as a result of the technology boom, and after-school programs are an ideal place for children to learn creative ways to find information. If your program does not have Internet access, ask a local school or public library if the children in your program can use their computers. When children express interest in particular careers or events, help them think about where in their community they can find information about those topics: whom they can call, where they can visit, and what they should read. Then let children practice these skills. This exercise will teach them to be creative problem solvers, able to think about what resources are available to them and how to access them best.

Model Program – Reading is Cool! ©

School's Out Consortium
801 23rd Avenue S.
Seattle, WA 98144
Contact: Sarah Mello Temple
(206) 323-2396

Reading is Cool!© was developed by the School's Out Consortium to help children and improve their literacy skills by encouraging them to enjoy recreational reading, increasing their exposure to literacy-based activities, and expanding their access to culturally relevant literature.

After-school programs selected to participate in Reading is Cool!© agree to integrate literacy activities into their programs for at least 30 minutes a day, four days a week. In order to help them do this, programs receive:

- a Curriculum Starter Kit including 40 books for children, periodicals, reference materials for staff, materials for parents, and incentives;
- a $200.00 Family Literacy Stipend for family literacy activities, events, and materials
- a three hour Recreational Reading Strategies Training focusing on the three starter components of Reading is Cool!©: silent reading, reading aloud, and journaling;
- eight hours of on-site technical assistance by Reading is Cool!© trainers;
- semiannual newsletters with strategies and resources;
- networking meetings with resource sharing and a special literacy presentation to continue the enhancement of staff skills in literacy-based recreational reading strategies.

One of the most important lessons learned through this program is that support for literacy needs to extend beyond the children in the program and include the children's families. According to Sarah Mello Temple, who leads Reading is Cool!© at the School's Out Consortium, "Often the literacy level of the family members is such that they are not able to support the children's reading. This year, we have added family literacy stipends to the project to help programs involve families in the literacy work of the program. Some programs may choose to host an event, others may purchase books to go home to families, others may sponsor parent education classes or events."

The School's Out Consortium, through the MOST Initiative, has developed exciting strategies for supporting programs that serve immigrant and refugee children in Seattle. These sites are receiving additional curriculum and training stipends so programs have the resources necessary to meet the specific needs of their children and families. In addition, this year the Seattle Emergency Housing program, which works with children and families in transition, is part of Reading is Cool!©. It will be exciting to learn how this site works to provide consistent literacy support to families in transition.

Possible Outcomes

Research clearly shows that the outcomes described below are critical for children learning to read. This section provides information to help program staff articulate why the activities they are doing support children's learning.

- *Increase children's motivation to learn to read.*

Research shows that motivation is a crucial factor in learning to read (National Research Council, 1998). If children are excited about reading, see adults they respect reading, and know that reading is a tool for accomplishing their goals, they will read more and will be less likely to give up when they have difficulties. Out-of-school-time programs can help children see the many advantages of literacy skills and allow children the freedom to explore their own interests.

- *Increase the amount of reading, writing, and communicating children do.*

Research shows that the more children read, the better their reading skills become. Children who spend less of their out-of-school time reading score lower on reading tests. Research shows that children "use it or lose it." During the summer months, younger children and those with poor reading skills show substantial losses in reading ability (National Research Council, 1998). Children need as many opportunities to practice these skills as possible. Out-of-school-time programs can provide new and exciting ways for children to practice reading, writing, and communicating.

- *Increase children's background knowledge and vocabulary.*

Background knowledge refers to the information and experiences that a child can draw from when trying to read and understand a story. Background knowledge and a strong vocabulary are crucial for reading comprehension. When reading, children (and adults) draw on information they already know about a topic to understand the story. If you know little or nothing about a topic, it is very difficult to read about it. For example, a child will find it very difficult to read a story about an iguana if he does not know that an iguana is a large lizard.

Developing background knowledge is important for all children but is particularly important for children who have not had a wide variety of experiences (National Research Council, 1998). Through field trips and activities, out-of-school-time programs can help children explore their communities and learn about the world around them. Trips to museums and the zoo, learning from local musicians and artists, seeing photographs of outer space—all of these help children develop the background knowledge and vocabulary that will help them read.

Another form of background knowledge that children need when learning to read is a large vocabulary. Building vocabulary and speaking skills is important for all children but is particularly important for children whose first language is not English (National Research Council, 1998). When children are learning to read, they rely heavily on their knowledge of spoken English. Often educators encourage children to "sound out" words that they do not recognize. In using this technique, children try out different combinations of sounds until they reach one that they recognize. This strategy works because children usually know the pronunciation and the meaning of many more words than they can read. But this "sound it out" strategy is helpful only if a child will recognize the word once he or she pronounces it correctly. Children whose first language is not English need extra help building strong vocabularies to help them read, comprehend, and communicate well.

Model Program—After-School Literature Project: Stronger Readers, Stronger Kids

Developmental Studies Center
2000 Embarcadero, Suite 305
Oakland, CA 94606-5300
Contact: Fran Chamberlain
(510) 533-0213

The After-School Literature Project is designed to use after-school programs to get 5- to 13-year olds excited about books, talking and writing about issues that good books raise, and thinking about how to apply lessons from books to their own lives. The Developmental Studies Center is working to bring its expertise in childhood learning and development and in classroom literacy programs to after-school organizations, including the Boys and Girls Clubs of America, the YMCA of the USA, the Community Network for Youth Development in San Francisco, the Francis Child Development Institute in Kansas City, and The Partnership for After-School Education in New York City.

This is the second year of a three-year development project. Sites receive free sets of children's books and accompanying facilitator's guides to help program staff make each reading experience engaging and thought provoking. Staff members learn how to use books to structure discussions about how characters act and the choices they face. These discussions help children connect the character's actions and decisions to their own experiences, values, and choices. The facilitator's guides include writing, drama, and art activities that reinforce and further explore the ideas raised in the discussion.

For example, one book used in the project is *Summer Wheels* by Eve Bunting. The book is about two boys who borrow bikes from the Bicycle Man—an older man who fixes bicycles and lets neighborhood kids use them for free. When a child misuses the privilege, the Bicycle Man does not react angrily (as the other children do) but instead develops a relationship with the boy, providing a springboard for discussion about trust, fairness, responsibility, and friendship. The facilitator's guide provides ideas for discussions, role plays, journal writing, and a mock newspaper interview with the Bicycle Man. It even suggests extending the activities to include a bicycle repair workshop.

The pilot sites receive ongoing staff development and site support. At the end of the developmental stage, a complete program of curriculum resources and staff development will be available to after-school sites across the county.

Necessary Supports and Resources

- *Information on how to integrate literacy activities into programs.*

Many activity books are available that can give staff members examples of literacy activities and suggestions for integrating these activities into programs (see the Appendix). But in addition to referring to these books and attending workshops and conferences, it is essential that staff members understand what the desired outcomes are, such as increasing children's motivation to learn or building background knowledge. This information gives staff the ability to adapt activities to the interests of the children and the available resources while still providing a meaningful learning experience.

- *Training and technical assistance.*

Although many programs succeed in building supports for children's literacy development without external assistance, literacy experts strongly encourage programs to seek help from local literacy experts, such as teachers, literacy groups, or reading specialists, who can train staff, answer questions, and model literacy activities. Many program staff, especially those just beginning to provide support for literacy, find that on-site technical assistance—someone to come to the program, model literacy activities with children, then coach staff and answer specific questions—is extremely helpful.

- *Space for reading and writing.*

Children need a cozy place with couches and soft pillows to relax and read. They also need child-size tables and chairs, pencils, markers, and all types of paper, so they can write. Books should be attractively displayed and easily accessible. (Note: The reading corner should not be used as a time-out space, as this will connect reading with punishment in the children's minds.)

- *Adequate yearly budget, to build a diverse library of developmentally appropriate books that can be attractively displayed, and access to a school or community library.*

It is important for programs to have a wide selection of books for children to choose from. The Appendix includes sources of inexpensive books. An excellent way to supplement your program's books is through trips to your local library. Selecting high-quality age- and culturally appropriate books can be challenging. Ask your local librarian for assistance, or contact the American Library Association (see Appendix) for help.

Strategy: Integrating Literacy Activities into Programs

Program staff can enhance children's literacy skills by integrating literacy activities into their other programming. No matter what topic the children have decided to explore, they use reading and discussion to learn about their topic, supplemented with field trips and guest speakers to broaden their background knowledge. This approach reinforces literacy skills that children learn in school and at home by showing children how these skills can be used to help them explore their own interests. Some programs have staff with curriculum knowledge, but many programs will need assistance in developing projects that intentionally support learning. Another approach is integrating tutors into your program, or setting up a reading buddy system. Again, program providers may find that their efforts are more successful if they receive external training and/or technical assistance from reading experts.

Model Program—Having an Impact on Communities Through the Arts

North Shore Fine Arts Organization
3712 North Broadway, Suite 711
Chicago, IL 60613
Contact: Tony Small, Director
(312) 664-0895

In summer 1999, North Shore Fine Arts Organization (NSFO), in collaboration with Chicago MOST (Making the Most of Out-of-School Time), piloted one of the most comprehensive fine arts inner-city programs available to youth ages five to 13. The program was hosted at three sites, including BENECAMP *(St. Benedict Academy of the Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago)*, Brenneman Chicago Elementary Public School, and City Lights *(Fourth Presbyterian Church)*. Composer Tony Small spearheaded the project and has been selected as one of the 55 top community millennium artists. The music, curriculums, and unique pedagogy integrate math, science, and the language arts for over 150 underserved youth.

"Reading to Win" is a project designed to encourage children to read more. It challenges children to read at home for a least one half-hour and during time spent at the program. Older students along with teachers get the opportunity to read to the younger children and to test their comprehension of the story at the end. This is a great mentoring situation for both parties involved. Students compete for weekly bonus points, prizes, and final awards for the most books read. The students who participate get the opportunity to manage the program's library. There is also a "Language and Linguistics" class, which serves as a remedial arts tool, where children review the parts of speech and play creative games.

While this approach aids in improving reading skills, the program's most successful tool has been integrating reading into arts activities. The following methods are the principal interventions:

Kidz Theatre
In Kidz Theatre, children learn to memorize lines and act out lengthy scripts. While all students are encouraged to read and perform, those who do not are utilized as directors. They have the official duties of following along with the script and cueing fellow actors on missed words or paragraphs.

Singing Kidz
In music, young children are taught most of the songs by rote and given booklets beyond their grade level so that they can learn the vocabulary. They even learn lengthy rap songs. Science and language arts vocabulary is integrated into the music, and the songbooks even include Latin roots and phonetic breakdown for easier reading.

Parents and guardians are encourage to support Reading to Win by reading the suggested poetry and prose to the program's participants at home. The readers' names are placed on a large chart that displays the number of books read. Children receive both awards and recognition for their hard work. The program outcomes include not only an increase in reading scores but the creation of a booklet of original work by children, staff, and other authors.

Approach

- *Incorporate reading, writing, and speaking activities into programming involving recreation, arts, theater, music, community service, or field trips.*

Staff and children develop themes or long-term projects that children are very interested in and integrate many different activities into the projects. The concept is very simple, but implementation requires skill, planning and creativity. Many different approaches have been written about, including the "Project Approach," based on work by Lilian Katz and Sylvia Chard, and the development of "thematic curricula" (see the Appendix for additional resources).

This approach builds on the foundations of the previous strategy. Programs with staff members who use teachable moments to engage children in literacy activities and who know how to help children access information and resources through a variety of methods can build from those foundations to this more complex model. Most importantly, staff members need experience listening to children, so they can determine what really interests them. Staff members will also need paid planning time and should be well informed about resources available in the community, so they can seek out resources that match children's interests.

The Example of a Skit

A group of 4th graders decide to perform a skit for the next parent potluck dinner. The children can work together to develop the plot and write and edit the script. Staff can facilitate discussions about content and guide children to develop the story from beginning to climax to end. Recruit a local theater major to help the children develop stage sets and acting skills. Theater offers children wonderful opportunities to learn about sequencing stories, character development, performance, self-expression, speaking with meaning, and problem solving. This project could include a field trip to the theater for children to see a professional play.

Possible Outcomes

This approach builds directly on supports provided in the previous strategy, so the outcomes of increasing motivation, time spent practicing literacy skills, and vocabulary and background knowledge all still apply to this level. In addition:

- *Children see that literacy skills help them achieve their own goals on projects that interest them.*

Some children have a difficult time understanding why the skills they are learning in school are useful to them. Because they don't see how these skills are important, they have very little motivation to master them, especially if the skills are difficult. If program staff can work closely with children to figure out what truly interests them, they can then help the children develop projects to explore their interests. Only then will children see that literacy skills can help them achieve their goals.

Necessary Supports and Resources

Many program providers find that training and technical assistance in building thematic curricula is necessary. Local teachers, particularly those at alternative schools, may have expertise in this area. Technical assistance providers who help program planners develop curricula in the arts or other areas may also be able to help. In addition, programs need staff members who have knowledge of the resources available in the community. If children are interested in topics in which staff members have little or no expertise, recruiting a local professional to work with the children may be helpful. This requires paid planning time for staff.

Approach

- *Tutors: Definitions, Benefits, and Limitations*

After-school programs use tutors for a wide range of activities. Although there are many good reasons to incorporate tutors into your program, it is important to understand the different kinds of tutors there are, as well as what these tutors should be expected to do.

Support tutors are often older children, volunteers from the community, or college students who have received training at their college, by a local tutor-training agency, or on-site by an educator or reading specialist. They have learned some tips for tutoring, basic information about how children learn, and barriers they might face. Federal, state, and local officials are encouraging organizations to set up tutoring programs to help children learn literacy skills. Should out-of-school-time programs try to bring support tutors into their programs? What do experts say these tutors can do?

> *Although volunteer tutors can provide* ***valuable practice and motivational support*** *for children learning to read, they* ***should not be expected*** *either to provide primary reading instruction or to instruct children with serious reading problems.* (National Research Council, 1998)

What does this mean for out-of-school-time programs? It means that well-trained, well-supervised support tutors can provide additional help to children. For children who need additional practice, one-on-one attention, and encouragement, tutors can be crucial. However, support tutors cannot compensate for poor reading instruction and should not be expected to provide direct reading instruction or remediation for children who are having serious difficulties learning to read.

Remediation tutors are experts, usually certified in education and/or reading, who work one-on-one with children, assess their reading skills, develop methods for helping them read better, then work individually with them to improve their skills. They are highly trained and experienced teachers (and usually charge fees for their services). If your program has a child with substantial difficulties learning to read, program staff, parents, the child, and a teacher or school representative should sit down together and discuss the best strategies for helping that child.

Factors to Consider When Involving Tutors in Your Program

- *Expectations.* Are your expectations and the tutor's the same? Be sure that expectations and responsibilities are clear. For example, will the tutor provide homework assistance, implement reading activities, or work one-on-one with a child on a preplanned reading schedule?
- *Commitment and stability.* Stable, caring, one-on-one relationships are one of the most valuable aspects of tutoring for children. For how long and how often will each tutor commit to working with a child? Will each tutor be assigned to one or two children or will the tutor work with anyone who needs help?
- *Supervision and ongoing training.* Who will supervise the tutors? Tutors need ongoing training and opportunities to share knowledge and experience together.

Model Program—Literacy Peers

St. Nicholas Neighborhood Preservation Corporation
Williamsburg Beacon Center
850 Grand Street, Room 218
Brooklyn, NY 11211
Contact: Charisse Johnson
(718) 387-2800 ext. 218

St. Nicholas Neighborhood Preservation Corporation employs young people between the ages of 16 and 22 in the delivery of literacy and education activities in its after-school program. The initial reason for starting the Literacy Peers Program, according to Director Eddie Calderon-Melendez, was to recruit high school students to supplement the staffing for the after-school program that was serving five- to ten-year-olds. Now they see the program as a wonderful enrichment offering for the children and as a support to help the young adults improve their own literacy skills, self-confidence, and employment skills. After participating in the Literacy Peers Program, the young adults have acquired the skills necessary to be after-school group leaders, summer camp counselors, and classroom aides. They have been hired to work at Beacon Schools, YMCAs, summer camps, and in a host of other childhood services–related positions.

The Literacy Peers Program at St. Nicholas is an informal education approach used at some of the Beacon Schools, linking community-based organizations with schools to build supportive communities for youth. The communities enable youth to meet their needs and assist them in building the academic and social skills necessary for becoming self-sufficient and successful young adults. The Beacon Schools offer resources to support youth in setting high expectations, attending school, solving problems, and sustaining effort. The Fund for the City of New York has published an excellent resource entitled *Beacons and After-school Education: Making Literacy Links,* which discusses storytelling, journal writing, drama, technology, and homework.

The Literacy Peers set forth clear expectations by outlining St. Nicholas's commitment and insisting that the youth, their parents, and their schools sign commitment contracts. They are provided with literacy training, internships in the after-school program, organized and coordinated evaluation through participant use of journals, a means of receiving school credit, and incentives such as trips, T-shirts, literacy learning kits, and certificates.

One of the keys to the success of the Literacy Peers is its extensive training program. The youths are offered 36 hours of training over a period of twelve weeks. Topics covered include:

- Youth development for five- to ten-year-olds
- Community service: Why do it?
- Why read aloud?
- Thematic learning: What is whole language?
- Self evaluation and review
- Journals and reflection
- Project presentations

Possible Outcomes

- *Provide support for children at risk of having academic difficulties.*

Programs that serve children who are in consistently low-performing schools or from high-poverty neighborhoods, or that have several non-English-speaking children, may have many children in need of support tutoring.

- *Provide valuable practice for reading and writing skills.*

Practice is especially crucial in the early grades, as children learn to read at very different speeds. Many children struggle with minor problems that can easily be overcome with a little extra help. Support tutors can give children the individualized attention they need to master small problems and provide much-needed encouragement and motivation.

- *Increase amount of one-on-one attention children receive.*

Children need time to talk, listen, and build relationships with adults. Some program staff are concerned that the children they serve are not getting the one-on-one attention that all children need, and lack of attention often leads to behavioral problems. If each tutor is assigned to work with the same child every time the tutor comes to the program, the program can offer a crucial opportunity for children to get the individualized attention they need. Try to recruit tutors who reflect the racial and ethnic backgrounds of the students.

Necessary Supports and Resources

There are many organizations that may be able to help you by providing trained tutors and training for your staff. Examples include local America Reads programs, adult education teachers, college education departments, reading teachers, or local reading specialists.

Approach

- *Reading Buddies or Cross-Age Tutoring*

In cross-age tutoring, older children are assigned to help younger children with reading and writing. *Young Children* published an article that describes this strategy, called "Increasing Literacy among Kindergartners through Cross-Age Training," by Marlene E. Henriques (1997).

Marlene Henriques wanted to develop a way to support students who had little literacy exposure before they came to kindergarten. She decided to try cross-age tutoring, pairing students in 4th to 6th grade who were reading at grade level but needed a boost in their self-esteem with her new kindergarten students. To set up the program she

- *developed a list of students who could follow directions, wanted to tutor, and were willing to make a commitment to it, then asked their teachers to help her make the final selection*
- *trained the tutors on how to read a story, help students understand the story, ask questions and predict story conclusions, and extend the learning with follow-up activities using puppets, games, and computers*

The tutors and tutees met for two 30-minute sessions each week. They would select one of twelve story boxes and read the story aloud. They would look for new words, think about the meaning of the story, and work on dictation. Using two standard evaluation tools, the tutees were assessed in September and again in January. There was a definite increase in emergent reading, writing, and speaking skills. For children who spoke English as a second language, there was an increase in their English fluency (Henriques, 1997).

After-school providers may find that assigning reading buddies is a great way to support the reading, writing, and social skills of both younger and older children. Teachers and local literacy experts can provide more detailed information about how to set up a cross-age tutoring program, including ways to train the older children and resources that you will need.

Strategy: Individualized Support

Literacy Expertise On Staff

If your program is one in which staff, parents, and school personnel have decided that literacy support needs to be a top priority for children, you may want to consider hiring a certified reading specialist or other literacy specialist. This person could supervise staff as they integrate literacy activities into the program, build an exciting print-rich environment, link with school teachers, and provide direct reading instruction to children who need it. Although this strategy may not be of interest to all program providers, some programs serve a large percentage of children whose literacy skills are not developing at an appropriate rate and whose parents feel this is a necessary support.

Approaches

- Link with children's schools and parents to decide which children are most in need of assistance.
- Have the reading specialist work in a team with teachers and parents to develop individual plans for each child needing assistance.
- Implement individual plans.
- Build family literacy programs.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of each strategy.

Possible Outcomes

- Improved literacy skills, including decoding, phonics, spelling, and speaking
- Remediation for children reading below grade level

For program providers choosing this strategy, it is important to remember that children's academic needs should be balanced with their needs to play, build relationships with peers, have a nutritious snack, and explore their environment. Some programs do remediation for one hour twice a week, allowing children time to relax and explore other interests during the rest of the week.

Issue in Depth: Children with Learning Disabilities

According to the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD), learning disabilities interfere with a person's ability to store, process, or produce information. The disability creates a gap between what a child is capable of doing and how he or she actually performs. People with learning disabilities are generally of average or above-average intelligence. Learning disabilities are often considered a "hidden handicap" because they are not easily recognized, accepted, or considered serious (NCLD, 1999b). It is estimated that 15–20 percent of the U.S. population has some form of learning disability. Children with learning disabilities that are not treated are more likely to have poor peer relations and low self-concept, to drop out of school, and to have limited job opportunities (NCLD, 1999c). It is extremely important that learning disabilities are diagnosed early, and that children receive appropriate intervention and support from experts (NCLD, 1999c).

Model Program—The Harbor Literacy Center

The Harbor for Boys and Girls
One East 104th Street
New York, NY 10029-4495
Contact: Gloria Schwartz
(212) 427-2244 ext. 515

The Harbor began in 1937 as a camp for New York City children and youth. It now provides multiple services at its current expanded location, which includes an on-site New York City Public School and an after-school program that together serve 3,500 children each year.

The Harbor Literacy Center began five years ago when Gloria Schwartz, Reading Specialist, joined the staff to provide clinical services for children from the Harbor who were referred to her for help with specific learning disabilities. Within two years, she realized that it would help all the children served if she trained staff in the development and coordination of curriculum. She began by training staff in thematic curricula so that all activities emerge out of a central theme. Literacy Center staff members research resources to support the themes (i.e., books, videos, museums, Web sites, artists, and other specialists who visit the program). The center currently has five staff members, including a curriculum resource specialist.

There are several keys to the success of the program. The literacy activities are built upon strong quality standards. Staff members are provided with ample support and training so they can do the job competently and consistently. Staff members select themes that take into account the interests of children and youth, as well as the skills and interests of the staff. They work with the reading specialist to integrate literacy into the theme. A recent theme, for example, was "Arts Around the World." Each age group explored dance, music, and the visual arts of a particular continent. The Literacy Center supplied the resources, which included books, articles, Web sites, trips to museums, and guest artists who did demonstrations. The walls of the school came alive with examples of the students' artwork. One class became interested in Indonesian shadow theater and created its own, inviting other children and parents to attend.

The Reading Remediation Clinic is an important part of the Literacy Center. Teachers, program directors, and counselors who have observed evidence of some type of learning problem refer students to the clinic. Ms. Schwarz evaluates students through a series of diagnostic tests and consults with the referral source to decide if the student is in need of reading remediation or tutoring. In addition to a reading comprehension component, the clinic uses a structured, multidisciplinary approach based on Orton-Gillingham training, which emphasizes a multisensory integration of phonemic patterns.

Dyslexia is by far the most common learning disability affecting reading and writing. The characteristic of dyslexia which people are most familiar with is that people with dyslexia often reverse or incorrectly sequence letters within words when reading or writing (i.e., bird/brid, did/bib, on/no). But dyslexia has other symptoms as well, such as problems expressing thoughts orally or in written form, as well as problems with spelling, handwriting, written language, and math computation (International Dyslexia Association [IDA], 1999).

Attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (AD/HD) is not technically a learning disability, but it interferes with a child's ability to concentrate, which can make learning very difficult. It is possible for a child to have both a learning disability and AD/HD (NCLD, 1999b). If you think a child is at risk, discuss your concerns with his or her parents. Although mental retardation, autism, deafness, blindness, or behavioral disorders may make learning difficult, these are technically not learning disabilities (NCLD, 1999b).

A learning disability must be diagnosed by a professional. Teachers and special education experts are best qualified to determine the specific curricula to meet a student's needs. Selecting the appropriate reading method for a child with a reading disability is critical for success. "Long-term studies ... have shown that 90 to 95 percent of reading-impaired children can overcome their difficulties if they receive appropriate treatment at an early age" (NICHD, 1998). It is important to understand that not all children who have trouble with reading have a learning disability, but it is important that they be tested if they exhibit several of the symptoms.

Strategies to Help Children with Learning Disabilities

- Praise children's successes, do not just focus on mistakes.
- Help children learn and practice organization skills.
- Do not put children with learning disabilities under time pressure, or under pressure of competition.
- Follow a structured schedule as often as possible.
- Provide clear and concise instructions, and repeat them when necessary.
- Help children learn and practice appropriate social skills.

(Adapted from NCLD, 1999a)

After-school programs serving children with learning disabilities should seek out additional training and support. Staff members can learn many simple strategies that can help children. For example, a staff member can help a child who is easily distracted and whose eyes roam all over the page of a book by cutting a thin strip out of a piece of paper and placing it over the page, allowing the child to see only one line of text at a time. Strategies such as these should be developed with the help of an expert.

Children with learning disabilities or physical disabilities are often pulled out of the regular classroom for large portions of the school day. After-school programs can provide these children with their greatest opportunity to build relationships with their peers and to focus on areas where they have special talents.

Issue in Depth: Children Whose First Language Is Not English

Educators often disagree about the best way to teach children whose first language is not English. Some educators believe that children should learn basic reading skills in their first language and then, as their English skills improve, learn to read in English. Others feel that it is better to teach children to speak and read English as quickly as possible. Researchers are moving toward reaching an agreement on best practice. Below are the two key points of this new position.

- *Best practice:*

Children should learn to read in their native language while learning to speak and understand English. The skills used to read transfer easily from one language to another. Once a child has learned to speak and understand basic English and has learned to read in his or her first language, the teacher can extend reading skills to English (National Research Council, 1998).

- *If that's not possible:*

Some schools serve many children who speak a wide variety of languages. If the school does not have staff members who speak the child's first language or adequate written materials for the child to read, then the first step is to teach the child to speak English. Postpone formal reading instruction until the child learns speech sounds, sentence structure for speaking, and basic vocabulary (National Research Council, 1998).

What Can Out-of-School Time Programs Do to Help?

Research shows that when learning to read, children often "sound out" words. They try different pronunciations of the letters until they find a pronunciation that they recognize as a word. Therefore, children not only need to know the sounds of letters but also must be familiar with the words that they are reading. Children who do not speak English will not recognize the words when they reach the correct pronunciation. They will also have difficulty learning reading comprehension skills, because many of the words will not be familiar to them.

Out-of-school-time programs that serve children with limited English skills should work with children's teachers and parents to develop support strategies for children. In addition, programs can work to help children improve their vocabulary and background knowledge through frequent conversation and exposure to exciting new activities and experiences such as field trips to museums.

Conclusion

Many strategies and program models have been presented to show the wide variety of ways that after-school programs can support children's literacy development. If your program is just beginning to explore these strategies, take it slowly! Develop one support at a time. Seek advice from local experts or staff from other programs that may be using some of these strategies. The Appendix contains additional information, including publications of interest and contact information for organizations that can help after-school program providers explore ways to support children's literacy development.

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Appendix

Checkpoints for Progress in Reading & Writing for Families and Communities, ***Reprinted with permission from America Reads Challenge*** 30

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Checkpoints for Progress in Reading & Writing for Families and Communities

America Reads Challenge, February 1998

Note: These materials often refer to the family environment, but all of the ideas are useful for after-school programming. Also, you may want to hand these materials out to parents to help them support children's literacy skills at home.

Reprinted with permission.
Source: America Reads Challenge
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue
Washington, DC 20202-0107
Phone: (202) 401-8888
Fax: (202) 401-0596
http://www.ed.gov/inits/americareads

Kindergarten Students

In kindergarten (children five and six years old), most children get better at reading and writing by speaking and getting to know the alphabet, sounds, and words.

Reading

Your child...

- Understands that print goes from left to right.
- Knows the letters and sounds of the alphabet.
- Knows simple words like *the, and, it,* and *is.*
- Starts to read signs, food packages, and other everyday items.
- Likes being read to and has favorite books and stories.

Writing

Your child...

- Uses scribbling, pictures, and some letters and words to tell a story.
- Writes his or her own name and a few simple words.
- Tries to use letters and sounds he or she knows to start writing things such as lists and invitations

How you can help:

- Read out loud and talk or sign about stories every day.
- Get your child a library card and go to the library regularly. Request songs and rhymes on tape.
- Read and say or sign nursery rhymes and sing songs together.
- Talk with your child's teacher often about your child's work.
- Let your child see you reading for fun.
- Take time each day to talk about school and share your day.
- Have a writing supply box with crayons and paper.
- Watch educational television programs that teach letter sounds and words. Limit other types of TV viewing.
- Listen to your child. Ask your child to listen to others

A child who has successfully mastered these skills will be able to understand the following excerpt when it is read aloud:

Kindergarten: *Danny and the Dinosaur*, by Sid Hoff

"The dinosaur covered his eyes. All the children ran to hide. The dinosaur looked and looked but he couldn't find the children. "I give up," he said. Now it was the dinosaur's turn to hide. The children covered their eyes. The dinosaur hid behind a house. The children found him. He hid behind a sign. The children found him. He hid behind a big gas tank. The children found him again. They found him again and again and again."

Books to read at this level:

Red Light, Green Light, by Margaret Wise Brown
Fox on Wheels, by Edward Marshall
Arthur's Reading Race, by Marc Brown
Nate the Great, by Majorie Sharmat

Third Grade

In third grade, most children get better at reading, writing, speaking and listening. All students read and write every day. They start to move from "learning to read" to "reading to learn."

Reading

Your child...

- Reads many kinds of children's books.
- Reads for fun, information, and understanding.
- Uses different ways of reading – sounding out words, getting information from the story, and personal knowledge – to understand stories and learn new words.
- Understands the themes or main ideas in what he or she reads.

Writing

Your child...

- Puts together thoughts and information for writing.
- Uses correct grammar, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and sentence structure in final work.
- Includes main ideas, background details, and words that describe, in written work.
- Corrects and rewrites work as necessary.

How you can help:

- Have a daily family reading time. Take turns reading out loud every day.
- Talk about family and community events.
- Visit your child's school often and ask to see work that shows your child's progress.
- Talk with your child's teacher and ask how you can help with learning at home.
- Ask your child to read wherever you go – in the car, grocery store, and park.
- Renew your child's library card. Visit the library often to check out books.
- Carefully pick the TV programs your child watches. Watch and talk about TV programs together.
- Use good listening skills. Show your child how to politely listen, watch, and take turns while speaking or signing.
- Give book and magazine subscriptions as gifts.

A child who has successfully mastered these skills should be able to read and understand the following excerpts:

First Grade*: Franklin is Bossy*, by Paulette Bourgeois

"In his room, Franklin built a castle. He made a cape to be brave in. He made shields and swords and suits of armor. He drew pictures. He played house. He read stories. He played by himself for one whole hour, and then he didn't know what to do. So, Franklin went looking for company. His friends were in the river, cooling off."

Books to read at this level:
Amelia Bedelia, by Peggy Parish
Clifford the Big Red Dog, by Norman Bridwel
Freight Train, by Donald Crews
The Very Hungry Caterpillar, by Eric Carle

Second Grade: *Curious George*, by H. A. Rey

"The hat had been on the man's head. George thought it would be nice to have it on his own head. He picked it up and put it on. The hat covered George's head. He couldn't see. The man picked him up quickly and popped him into a bag. George was caught. The man with the big yellow hat put George into a little boat, and a sailor rowed them both across the water to a big ship."

Books to read at this level:
Corduroy, by Don Freeman
Ira Sleeps Over, by Waber Barnard
Bony-Legs, by Joanna Cole
Where is Cuddly Cat? by June Woodman
Frog and Toad are Friends, by Arnold Lobel
There's an Alligator Under My Bed, by Mercer Mayer
Bedtime for Frances, by Russell Hoban
Freckle Juice, by Judy Blume

Third Grade: *Sarah, Plain and Tall*, by Patricia MacLachlan

"I held my breath and floated at last, looking up into the sky, afraid to speak. Crows flew over, three in a row. And I could hear a killdeer in the field. We climbed the bank and dried ourselves and lay in the grass again. The cows watched, their eyes sad in their dinner-plate faces. And I slept, dreaming a perfect dream. The fields had turned to a sea that gleamed like sun on glass. And Sarah was happy."

Books to read at this level:
Encyclopedia Brown, Boy Detective, by Donald J. Sobol
The Fantastic Mr. Fox, by Roald Dahl
The Boxcar Children, by Gertrude Chandler Warner
There's a Boy in the Girls' Bathroom, by Louis Sachar

Sixth

In sixth grade, most students read many different kinds of writing, improve their listening and speaking skills, and write for different reasons and audiences.

Reading

Your child...

- Reads and understands fiction and nonfiction.
- Reads from books, magazines, newspapers, and other sources both inside and outside school.
- Connects ideas and information in reading with real-life experiences.
- Understands the author's purpose, tone, point of view, plot, and theme or main idea.

Writing

Your child...

- Thinks of and works on ideas for writing. Edits work to create a final paper.
- Uses the dictionary, thesaurus, encyclopedia, and other resources.
- Writes clearly using correct grammar and spelling in final drafts.
- Uses many different sentence structures and a large vocabulary.
- Writes for different reasons: to entertain, convince, teach, take notes, and tell ideas.

How you can help:

- Have a family time to talk about books and take turns reading out loud.
- Visit the library regularly to borrow books and use the computer resources, including the Internet.
- Talk with your child's teacher often and ask how you can help with learning at home.
- Make sure your child has a regular time and quiet place to do homework each day.
- Ask your child questions about schoolwork and activities and share your daily experiences.
- Ask your child to get involved in school and community activities such as sports, clubs, community service, and the arts.
- Ask and help your child to write notes and letters.

A child who has successfully mastered these skills should be able to read and understand the following excerpts:

Fourth Grade: *Nothing's Fair in Fifth Grade*, by Barthe DeClements

"Kenny was on his best behavior when our family arrived at school. Mother and Dad found Sharon's parents, and we all went to our classroom together. My folks and Sharon's are friends. Sometimes our families go camping together. I try to have fun with Sharon when Diane isn't along. It isn't easy. Sharon is interested in two things – what her mother says and how many presents she can pile up. You'd think she was an only child instead of Diane."

Books to read at this level:

How to Eat Fried Worms, by Thomas Rockwell
Chocolate Fever, by Robert Smith
Flossie and the Fox, by Patricia C. McKissack

Fifth Grade: *Amber Brown Is Not a Crayon*, by Paula Danziger

"I look over at Justin. He is doing the math work very quickly. I look down at my math and then start chewing on my stub of a pencil. It would have been nice if Justin had given me a new pencil, too. Finished with his math, Justin picks up my paper and checks it out. He finds two mistakes, shows me how to do it correctly and then helps me finish up. Fractions are not my favorite thing."

Books to read at this level:

The Cricket in Times Square, by George Selden

Bridge to Terebithia, by Katherine Paterson

The Hundred Penny Box, by Sharon Mathis

Charlotte's Web, by E.B. White

Sixth Grade: *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*, by Mildred D. Taylor

"They didn't know how wide the hole actually was. Some of them took a wild guess and tried to jump it; but most of them miscalculated and fell in, to our everlasting delight. Others attempted to hop over the gullies to the forest to bypass the hole; however, we knew from much experience that they would not make it. By the time most of the students managed to get to the other side of the ditch, their clothes were dripping with the weight of the muddy water."

Books to read at this level:

Mufaro's Beautiful Daughters, by John Steptoe

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, by Roald Dahl

Little House in the Big Woods, by Laura Ingalls Wilder

The Great Brain, by John Fitzgerald

Additional Publications on Literacy

Starting Out Right: A Guide to Promoting Children's Reading Success
This guide is based on the research reviewed in the National Research Council book, Preventing Reading Difficulties in Young Children. It is an easy-to-understand guide, developed for parents and community members, explaining how children learn to read and offering many concrete ideas for helping them improve their literacy skills.

Contact: National Academy Press
2101 Constitution Ave, NW
Lockbox 285
Washington, DC 20055
1-800-624-6242
http://bob.nap.edu/readingroom/books/sor

Fun Literacy Activities for OST Programs: A Handbook for Providers
Provides a variety of activities and crafts for use in OST that complement ideas and knowledge gained in school. Appropriate activities for all ages in individual or group settings.

Contact: ReadBoston
43 Hawkins Street
Boston, MA 02114
Phone: (617) 918-5290

OR

Parents United for Child Care
30 Winter Street, 7th floor
Boston, MA 02108
Phone: (617) 426-8288

Identifying Local Resources for Your Literacy Program
This guide offers suggestions for where to look in your communities for many different kinds of literacy resources. Topics include where to look for help with finding volunteers, funding, additional books and materials, and technical assistance.

Contact: LEARNS (Linking Education and America Reads through National Service)
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
101 SW Main, Suite 500
Portland, OR 97204
1-800-361-7890
http://www.nwrel.org/learns/pastfeature/feature999/index.html

LEARNS (Linking Education and America Reads through National Service) provides training and technical assistance to Corporation for National Service projects focused on literacy and education. Their **Web site** contains instructions to help programs make children's games into exciting, literacy-rich activities.
Contact: http://www.nwrel.org/learns/resources/games

Supporting Community Learning: A Staff Development and Resource Guide for After-School Youth-Education Programs
Focuses on staff development and the importance of effective curriculum development in OST. Workshop guides and suggestions are also included.

Contact: Institute for Literacy Studies
Lehman College
City University of New York
Bronx, NY 10468
718-960-8758

Handbook for CUNY Literacy Enhancement Project After-School Program
Proposes activities and schedules to enhance "on grade level" ability and confidence with regards to reading in OST.

Contact: York College
94-20 Guy R. Brewer Blvd.
Jamaica, NY 11451-0001
Phone: (718) 262-2465

The Project Approach: Making Curriculum Come Alive
The Project Approach: Managing Successful Projects
These publications, both by Sylvia Chard, are helpful resources for implementing project-based learning into your after-school program.
Contact: These books are now published by Scholastic, and can be purchased in your local bookstore.

Sylvia Chard, who with Lilian Katz coauthored **Engaging Children's Minds: The Project Approach** (also an excellent resource for after-school programs), has set up a highly informative Web site filled with resources and information on the Project Approach.
Contact: http://www.ualberta.ca/~schard/projects.htm

Assistance Selecting Appropriate Books

If you would like assistance selecting age and culturally appropriate books for children, contact a librarian at your local school or public library, or contact the American Library Association.

Contact: American Library Association
50 E. Huron St.
Chicago, IL 60611
Phone: (312) 280-3215
Fax: (312) 944-3897
http://www.ala.org

Where to Find Inexpensive (or Free) Children's Books

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Source: LEARNS (Linking Education and America Reads through National Service)
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
101 SW Main, Suite 500
Portland, OR 97204
1-800-361-7890
http://www.nwrel.org/learns

If you're in the market for inexpensive children's books, check out the organizations and publishers listed below. Locally, contact the public and school libraries, bookstores, and similar businesses. They may have older or overstocked books they can donate.

Children's Literacy Initiative
2314 Market Street
Philadelphia, PA 19103
215-561-4676

First Book
1133 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Washington DC 20036
202-393-1222
www.firstbook.org

Reading is Fundamental (RIF)
600 Maryland Avenue, SW
Suite 600
Washington DC 20024
202-287-3220
www.rif.org

Rolling Readers USA
3049 University Avenue
San Diego, CA 92104
800-309-READ (7323)
www.rollingreaders.org

Pati Cake Books
2771 S. Ocean Boulevard
Cayucos, CA 93430
www.paticakebooks.com
A nonprofit organization that gives books to suffering children or their caregivers, particularly to children with cancer or AIDS; children who are homeless, living in shelters, foster homes, or orphanages; and children who have been abused.

Inexpensive books are also available from the publishers listed below; prices usually range between one and five dollars. Local bookstores and Internet distributors like amazon.com often carry titles from imprints like Everyman and Signet.

Dover Publications, Inc.
(Dover Children's Classics, Dover Thrift Classics for Young People)
Department DTE
31 E. Second Street
Mineola, NY 11501
800-223-3130
516-294-7000
Request catalog #59047-X

Signet Classics
NAL/Dutton, a division of Penguin Books
375 Hudson Street
New York, NY 10014-3657
800-331-4624
212-366-2000
www.penguinputnam.com

Everyman's Library and Everyman's Library Children's Classics
Alfred A. Knopf, Inc.
400 Hahn Road
Westminister, MD 21157
800-733-3000
www.randomhouse.com/knopf

High Interest/Low Reading Level Book Publishers for Kindergarten through 3rd Grade

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Source: LEARNS (Linking Education and America Reads through National Service)
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
101 SW Main, Suite 500
Portland, OR 97204
1-800-361-7890
www.nwrel.org/learns

These publishers feature some books and series that are easier to read but hold the interest of older readers. Check out Web sites or catalogs carefully to ensure that the books you choose match both reading level and student interest. Specific series titles are italicized after the publisher contact information.

Academic Therapy Publications
High Noon Books
20 Commercial Boulevard
Novato, CA 94949
800-422-7249
www.atpub.com
High Noon Books

Bantam-Doubleday Dell
1540 Broadway
New York, NY 10036-4094
800-223-6834
www.bdd.com
Bantam First Skylark Books

Bantam Doubleday-Dell Publishing Group, Inc.
666 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10103
212-782-9000
www.bdd.com
A Young Yearling Book

Cartwheel Books/Scholastic
P.O. Box 7502
Jefferson City, MO 65102
800-325-6149
www.scholastic.com
Hello Reader!

Children's Publication Division
Simon & Schuster
1230 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10020
www.simonandschuster.com
Bank Street Ready-to-Read

Ideals Children's Books
Hambleton-Hills Publishing, Inc.
1501 Country Hospital Road
Nashville, TN 37218
615-254-2480
Discovery Readers

Harper Trophy-Harper Collins
10 East 53rd Street
New York, NY 10022
800-242-7737
www.harperchildrens.com
I Can Read Books
Chapter Books

The Lerner Group / First Avenue Editions
241 First Avenue North
Minneapolis, MN 55401
612-332-3344
www.lernerbooks.com
Carolhroda On My Own Books

Penguin Putnam
390 Murray Hill Parkway
East Rutherford, NJ 07073
800-631-8571
www.penguinputnam.com
All Aboard Reading Series

Penguin Putnam, Inc.
375 Hudson Street
New York 10014
www.penguin.com
Puffin Easy-to-Read

Random House
400 Hahn Road
Westminister, MD 21157
301-751-2600
www.randomhouse.com
Step Into Reading
Stepping Stone Books

Literacy Organizations

American Library Association
The American Library Association provides leadership for the development, promotion, and improvement of library and information services in order to enhance learning and ensure access to information for all. Their Web site contains lists of events and conferences, as well as lists of award winning books and literacy activities.
Contact:
American Library Association Headquarters
50 E. Huron St.
Chicago, IL 60611
Phone: (312) 280-3215
Fax: (312) 944-3897
http://www.ala.org
E-mail: ala@ala.org

National Center for Family Literacy
The National Center for Family Literacy is a non-profit organization supporting and advancing family literacy services for families across the United States through programming, training, research, advocacy and dissemination.
Contact:
National Center for Family Literacy
325 West Main Street, Suite 200
Louisville, KY 40202-4251
Phone: (502) 584-1133
http://www.famlit.org
E-mail: ncfl@famlit.org

State Literacy Resource Centers
Check the Web site to find the Literacy Resource Center in your state.
http://www.ed.gov/Programs/bastmp/SLRC.htm

National Institute for Literacy
The National Institute for Literacy was created as a part of the 1991 Literacy Act to be the hub of national literacy efforts. By serving as a resource for the literacy community, the Institute assists in addressing urgent national priorities--upgrading the workforce, reducing welfare dependency, raising the standard of living, and creating safer communities.
Contact:
National Institute for Literacy
1775 I Street, NW, Suite 730
Washington, DC 20006-2401
Phone: 1-800-228-8813 or (202) 233-2025
Fax: (202) 233-2050
http://www.nifl.gov

America Reads Challenge
The America Reads Challenge calls on all Americans to support teachers and help ensure that every American child can read well and independently by the end of 3rd grade. The America Reads challenge motivates parents to foster a love of reading at home; recruits colleges to enlist students to tutor children as their work-study job; encourages teachers to utilize best practices in reading; and unites communities to form strong partnerships to promote children's literacy.
Contact:
America Reads Challenge
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue
Washington, DC 20202-0107
Phone: 1-800-USA-LEARN or
Phone: (202) 401-8888
Fax: (202) 401-0596
http://www.ed.gov/inits/americareads

Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)
The Educational Resources Information Center is a national information system designed to provide users with ready access to an extensive body of education-related literature. Established in 1966, ERIC is supported by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, and the National Library of Education.
Contact:
http://www.accesseric.org/
E-mail: accesseric@accesseric.org

ERIC's Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education
One of the most relevant sites in the extensive ERIC information system is that focused on elementary and early childhood education.
Contact:
http://ericeece.org

Developmental Studies Center
The Developmental Studies Center, formed in 1980, is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to help children develop intellectually, ethically, and socially. Their programs and materials have been recognized as exemplary by, among others, the Character Education Partnership, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the National School Boards Association, New Standards, the U.S. Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, and the U.S. Department of Education.
Contact:
Developmental Studies Center
2000 Embarcadero, Suite 305
Oakland, CA 94606-5300
Phone: (510) 533-0213
Fax: (510) 464-3670
http://www.devstu.org
E-mail: info@devstu.org

Literacy Volunteers of America

U.S. Department of Education
The administration's priorities include national efforts to improve reading and math, reduce class size, and strengthen school construction. Their Web site contains many valuable resources, including free publications on education topics and after-school programming.
Contact:
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20202
Phone: 1-800-USA-LEARN or
Phone: (202) 401-3132
Fax: (202) 401-3036
http://www.ed.gov

Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement (CIERA)
CIERA's mission is to improve the reading achievement of America's children by generating and disseminating theoretical, empirical, and practical solutions to persistent problems in the learning and teaching of beginning reading. Their Web site contains links, resources, and programs that are beneficial to the developing reader and his or her teachers/tutors/mentors. Also on their Web site is a large database of family literacy resources.
Contact:
Center for the Improvement of Early Reading Achievement
University of Michigan School of Education
610 E University Ave, Rm. 1600 SEB
Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1259
Phone: (734) 647-6940
Fax: (734) 763-1229
http://www.ciera.org
Email: ciera@umich.edu

Literacy Volunteers of America, Inc. is a national network of more than 350 locally based programs, supported by state and national staff, committed to changing lives through literacy.

Contact:
Literacy Volunteers of America
635 James Street
Syracuse, NY 13203
Phone: 315-472-0001
Fax: 315-472-0002
http:/www.literacyvolunteers.org
E-mail: info@literacyvolunteers.org

Reading is Fundamental

Reading Is Fundamental (RIF) is one of America's leading nonprofit children's literacy organization. RIF provides children with books and with literacy supports so that young children are prepared to learn reading and school-age children retain their motivation to read.

Contact:
Reading is Fundamental, Inc.
600 Maryland Ave, SW, Suite 600
Washington, DC 20024
Phone: 1-877-RIF-READ
Phone: 202-287-3220
http://www.rif.org

Reading Excellence Program

The U.S. Department of Education is offering a $260 million federal grant program to help States improve children's reading skills. The program supports professional development activities for teachers, transition programs to support children entering kindergarten, family literacy, and tutoring programs. This grant program aims to help children in high poverty areas have access to extra reading supports.

Contact:
Phone: (202) 260-8228
http://www.ed.gov/inits/FY99/REAflyer.html

The Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy

The Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy's goal is to establish literacy as a value in every family in America. They hope to break the intergenerational cycle of illiteracy by supporting the development of family literacy programs where parents and children can learn and read together.

Contact:
The Barbara Bush Foundation for Family Literacy
1112 16th Street NW, Suite 340
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: (202) 955-6183
Fax: (202) 955-8084

Out-of-School Time Organizations

National Institute on Out-of-School Time
The National Institute on Out-of-School Time's mission is to improve the quantity and quality of school-age care programs nationally by concentrating in five primary areas: research; education and training; consultation; program and community development; and public awareness.
Contact:
National Institute on Out-of-School Time
Center for Research on Women
Wellesley College
106 Central Street
Wellesley, MA 02481
Phone: (781) 283-2547
Fax: (781) 283-3657
http://www.wellesley.edu/WCW/CRW/SAC/
E-mail: niost@wellesley.edu

National Child Care Information Center
The National Child Care Information Center has been established to complement, enhance and promote child care linkages and to serve as a mechanism for supporting quality, comprehensive services for children and families.
Contact:
National Child Care Information Center
243 Church Street, NW, 2nd Floor
Vienna, VA 22180
Phone: (800) 616-2242
Fax: (800) 716-2242
http://www.nccic.org

National School-Age Care Alliance
The National School Age Care Alliance (NSACA) is a national membership organization whose mission is to support quality programs for school-age children and youth in their out-of-school hours. Established in 1987, NSACA provides an umbrella organization to link people who work with school-age children and youth in a wide variety of agencies and settings.
Contact:
National School-Age Care Alliance
1137 Washington Street
Dorchester, MA 02124
Phone: (617) 298-5012
Fax: (617) 298-5022
http://www.nsaca.org
E-mail: staff@nsaca.org

School-Age Notes
School-Age Notes develops and provides information, technical assistance and resources concerning children and youth in out-of-school settings: before and after school and during vacations.
Contact:
School-Age Notes
P.O. Box 40205
Nashville, TN 37204
Phone: (615) 279-0700
Fax: (615) 279-0800
http://www.schoolagenotes.com

Making the Most of Out-of-School Time (MOST)

How do we make the most of out-of-school time for our nation's children? This is the question at the heart of the MOST Initiative, a multi-million dollar project supported by the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund (DWRD), and designed in partnership with the National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST)* at the Wellesley Centers for Women. MOST (Making the Most of Out-of-School Time) seeks to improve the quality and availability of programming for children and youth in Boston, Chicago, and Seattle during the hours they are not in school. The National Institute on Out-of-School Time, with 20 years of action research and expertise in the field of school-age care, provides coordination and technical assistance to the Initiative.

MOST employs a **community-based, collaborative** approach toward improving the quality and quantity of out-of-school services for children and youth, especially those from low-income families. This strategy creates the opportunity to develop local capacity to provide leadership, resources and commitment to children's out-of-school time, and to develop an infrastructure capable of supporting a system of school-age care. As the infrastructure expands, strengthens, and new relationships are formed, there is potential for **systems change** to occur. The community now has the capacity to conduct planning, create partnerships and raise and expand resources to help all children access affordable, enriching opportunities during their non-school time. The multiple goals and activities of MOST are key to initiating and driving systems change that allows for long-term **sustainability**. These four concepts highlighted above—community based, collaborative, systems change, and sustainability, are the building blocks of MOST. They provide the conceptual framework and foundation for the myriad of efforts underway in all three MOST cities.

In each city, Action Plans were developed through an intensive collaborative process that allowed for community members to assess needs, develop strategies, and generate substantial matching funds. Three cities--**Boston, Chicago, and Seattle**--received grants in May 1995, of $1.2 million each for implementation of their three-year plan. Under the umbrella of one or more lead agencies, the MOST cities developed a governance structure to engage a wide range of stakeholders (e.g., school-age administrators and staff, city officials, parents, large youth-serving agencies, religious organizations, higher education institutions, public schools, etc.) to meet the goals of the Initiative. Although each city worked from similar goals, their action plans were quite different, reflecting the unique needs, priorities and resources of each city.

As a result of these preliminary findings, in 1998 the DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund awarded an additional $3.3 million to help Boston, Chicago, and Seattle extend their efforts to develop community-wide systems for providing before- and after-school care for 5 to 14 year olds, and to share lessons from this work with other cities. (See following page)

* *formerly the School-Age Child Care Project*

Early findings from an ongoing evaluation of the MOST Initiative show that the three cities are making progress in their efforts to improve the quality and availability of school-age care, especially for families in low-income communities. Some early results include:

- Approximately 6,000 new school-age care spaces have been created through the initiative
- More than $2 million in additional funds have been raised by the cities to support this work
- Hundreds of staff have received training to improve their skills for providing care for school-age youth
- In the three cities, the scope of services and range of programs available to families has been expanded by partnerships with park districts, schools, youth-serving organizations, cultural institutions and others

KEEP CONNECTED TO THE MOST INITIATIVE

- Visit the National Institute on Out-of-School Time on the **World Wide Web** at: **http://www.wellesley.edu/WCW/CRW/SAC/** [case sensitive]

- Discuss school-age issues on **SAC-L listserv.** To subscribe, send the message: **subscribe SAC-L <Your Name>** (substituting your own name, without brackets) to: **listserve@postoffice.eso.uiuc.edu.** If you have any questions about SAC-L, contact Brooke Harvey by e-mail at bharvey2@wellesley.edu or by telephone at (781) 283-2556.

We want to hear from you...

The National Institute on Out-of-School Time's (NIOST's) mission is to improve the quantity and quality of school-age child care programs nationally through collaborative work with communities, individuals, and organizations, and to raise the level of public awareness about the importance of children's out-of-school time. NIOST concentrates its efforts in four primary areas—research, education and training, consultation, and program development.

Have a MOST-like initiative in your community? Interested in starting one up? Please talk to us about it—let's share ideas and collaborate!

Joyce Shortt, Director
MOST Initiative
Center for Research on Women
106 Central Street
Wellesley, MA 02481
(781) 283-2526 Fax: (781) 283-3657
e-mail: jshortt@wellesley.edu

THE MOST INITIATIVE Issue Papers

Growing Together: Connections Between School Age Care and Youth Work Professions *by Marie Esposito, 21pp. 1997 $2.00*

Twelve Key Elements for Higher Education Training: A Conceptual Framework for the Field of School-Age Care *by Marie Esposito, Joan Costley, 26 pp. 1997 $3.00*

Making the MOST of Out-of-School Time: Technology's Role in Collaboration *Lilian Coltin, Kate Maguire, 34 pp. 1997 $3.00*

*Building a Professional Development System for the Field of Out-of-School Time *by Joan Costley 17 pp. 1998 $3.00*

*Credentialing in Out-of-School Time Programs *by Gwen G. Morgan, 23 pp. 1998 $3.00*

Homework Assistance and Out-of-School Time: Filling the Need, Finding a Balance *by Susan O'Connor, Kate Maguire, 46 pp. 1998 $4.00*

Video: The Human Side of Quality *1998, $10.00*

New

On the Road to SAC Professionalism Emerging Models, Trend, and Issues in Credentialing: A Working Paper *by Elizabeth A. Nilsen, 41 pp. 1999* $3.00

Coming Soon! After-School Facilities Video

** Available on our Web Site at*
www.wellesley.edu/WCW/CRW/SAC/most.html
For information and pricing, call:
(781) 283-2547